

**EAST COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES**

Meeting of November 5, 2008

Eastern Montgomery Regional Services Center
3300 Briggs Chaney Road
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904

Members Present: Kim Bobola, Ph.D. (Chair), Colleen Ionata (Vice Chair), Bill Strassberger (Parliamentarian), Vanessa E. Ali, Thomas Aylward, Marva R. Deskins, Esq., G. Stanley Doore, John J. Fausti, Esq., David M. Kochanski, Esq., Eric Luedtke, Benoy Thomas, John P. Thomas, Alfreda Hunt Payne, Ph. D., and Anthony Ramirez.

Members Absent: Sheala Durant (Secretary), Allan Mulligan, and Dwayne Parris.

Staff: Anise Key Brown (Director, Eastern Montgomery Regional Services Center) and Anjoo Chohda (Sr. Executive Administrative Aide, EMRSC).

Guests: Council Member Marc Elrich, Dale Tibbitts (Council member Marc Elrich's office), Frank Caruso (Greencastle Lakes Community Association), Robert Dongu (Gazette), Stuart Rochester (Fairland Master Plan), Terry Bork (East County Recreation Advisory Board Representative), Eileen Finnegan (Editor, Hillandale Citizen's Association), Michael R. Payne (spouse of board member).

Citizen's Forum: Chair Bobola welcomed everyone. Guests were asked to introduce themselves, and address any concerns or issues that they wished the Board to address. No concerns were mentioned.

Call to Order: The chair called the meeting to order at 7:25 p.m.

Chair Bobola introduced and welcomed special guest Councilmember Marc Elrich.

Speaker: Councilmember Marc Elrich gave an introduction and stated that he would be presenting a proposal that he has for a county wide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System

This proposal is an outgrowth of work completed last year as county officials updated the Growth Policy.

- People are concerned about traffic congestion on county roads, and that conditions could worsen and then overwhelm the infrastructure.
- The aim of the BRT proposal is to address these concerns by providing additional capacity.

- At the same time, the Council of Governments (COG)¹ has given a report on the status of air pollution levels in the region, and the troubling levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) that are only projected to increase through 2030 unless something is done to bring them in line with national standards for air quality.
- Further, in Montgomery County, there is little opportunity to add roadways, especially in the dense, more urban Down County region, to accommodate increases in population that are projected to grow by about a third (300,000 individuals) by 2050.

Taken together, these concerns about road infrastructure, air quality, and increasing population led to this proposal for a transit solution. This proposal has the potential to ease traffic, reduce pollution, and alleviate related budget demands in the short- and long-term.

What the BRT System Would Involve

Under the BRT System, a specific focus would be the reduction of morning rush-hour traffic. This alone could provide significant environmental relief. It would do so by taking advantage of median strips, dedicated right-of-ways, and reversible bus routes (which would eliminate the need for double tracks).

- In developing the proposal for the BRT system, staff in Councilmember Elrich's office examined an earlier proposal that was created by East County resident Dan Wilhelm. It involved a realignment of the Ride On Bus System, and was built on a Grid System for the entire county. The current proposal builds on the Wilhelm plan.
- A map that detailed the possible BRT routes was presented. The map included a route along Route 29 that could loop into the Food and Drug Administration's White Oak complex. The map also included a route that could align with the Purple Line, though this was not the focus of the evening's presentation. The advantages of BRT are in providing: (1) exclusive or shared transit ways; (2) bus priority/HOV lanes; (3) dedicated transit lines; and (4) faster fare collection.
- Similar transit systems are in place in Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Boston launched its BRT system in three phases, with the first one beginning in 2002. This has already resulted in cleaner air, as well as less expensive parking spaces and more of them. The third phase of Boston Project is scheduled to begin construction in 2011. Boston is the only major city that should meet clean air standards for 2011.

Councilmember Elrich summarized that the purpose of this update/presentation is to create an interest and awareness in the community that a BRT system can provide effective solutions. Moreover, the County can afford to implement it.

¹ The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is a regional organization of Washington area local governments. COG is composed of 21 local governments surrounding our nation's capital, plus area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. COG provides a focus for action and develops sound regional responses to such issues as the environment, affordable housing, economic development, health and family concerns, human services, population growth, public safety, and transportation.

Chair Bobola reviewed the presentation highlights and invited Board members' questions about the proposal.

- **John Thomas** asked if priority has been given to any routes. In response, Councilmember Marc Elrich indicated there are plans to assign funding to construction of the route from Olney to Glenmont. This would be an opportunity for Ramada and Montgomery County to work together.
- **Stan Doore** applauded Councilmember Elrich for choosing BRT instead of light rail, and suggested that BRT not only provides the county with an option for the use of clean diesel fuel, but also allows the use of wide roads that already exist (e.g., New Hampshire Avenue).
- **Stuart Rochester**, chairman of the Fairland Master Plan Committee, shared his appreciation that Councilmember Elrich has proposed "one of the few options that we have left," but said that he does not want a repeat of 1981 when development along Route 29 failed to include transit options.
- **John Fausti** commended Councilmember Elrich for the informative presentation, and asked if there would be consideration given to the comfort of the ride for seniors and others. Councilmember Elrich responded that the BRT will provide a more comfortable ride than Ride On does, and will function more like Metro than as a bus. The BRT system will have high quality vehicles.
- **Alfreda Payne** asked whether Councilmember Elrich's staff has examined similar transit systems in cities internationally. Councilmember Elrich responded that they had done so.
- **Eric Luedtke** asked what the next steps were, and in what way ECCAB could be of assistance. Councilmember Elrich encourages the Board to ask for the County Executive's support of this plan, and requests their support in pushing it further.
- Councilmember Elrich elaborated one way to find funding. It would involve an exchange in which 1) developers would accept the limits of the "road tests"; 2) the "road tests" would be taken away; and 3) money generated would go toward the development of the Transit System. In this way, more land could be leased, and it would be more profitable.

Chair Bobola recapped the discussion, and thanked Councilmember Elrich for the presentation and all board members for their participation in the discussion.

Approval of Minutes: [November 5, 2008 - 1] A motion to approve the minutes of October 1, 2008 was offered. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

Director's Report: Anise Key Brown

- Reminded new members to complete and return the Volunteer Registration form, thereby complying with this county requirement and ensuring that each board member is insured.
- Mentioned that 2009 calendars were available for members to take, courtesy of **Alfredda Payne**.
- Announced the following upcoming events:
 - *November 6.* East County Job Fair, co-sponsored by Councilmember Don Praisner.
 - *November 12.* White Oak Recreation Center, Public Forum at 7:00 p.m. at the Eastern Montgomery Regional Services Center (EMRSC).
 - *November 12.* Federal Drug Administration (FDA) Public Meeting from 7:00-9:00 p.m. ECCAB is encouraged to have a representative attend this meeting, since information will be shared that the board needs to know about. Additionally, an ECCAB tour of the FDA will be planned for the spring 2009.
 - *November 19.* County Executive Isiah Leggett will address the Fairland Civic Association regarding pedestrian safety, in light of the accident that occurred recently on Fairland Road.
 - *January 15, 2009* – An open meeting on Ethics is scheduled; details of the meeting were shared. ECCAB members are asked to participate.
- Thanked Marva Deskins, Kim Bobola, and all members of ECCAB for their participation in the **Leadership Summit**; acknowledged and thanked Michael Payne for assistance that he provided at the Leadership Summit in place of Dr. Payne; also thanked Dr. Payne for her support in coordinating Community Services Day.
- Mentioned that, as a result of the National Presidential Election, “history has been made.”

Chair's Report: Kim Bobola

- Applauded Marva Deskins and the Outreach Committee for putting the program together for the **East County Leadership Summit**, and thanked the Board members who helped in any way (e.g., attending the Summit, facilitating the breakout sessions, writing the proceedings, etc.). The Leadership Summit was a success, with over 75 people attending this event.
- Thanked each board member who participated in **Community Services Day**. Their support was valued, as this was a county-sponsored event.
- Announced the resignation of board member Kimberly Campbell, and acknowledged the leadership that she provided in education and in addressing youth issues.

- Announced that a letter related to the **Burtonsville Community Revitalization CIP** was sent to the Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee of the County Council. A copy of the letter was shared with board members.
- Publicized the Informational Public **Workshop on MD 28/MD 198 Corridor Improvement Project Planning** Study that is scheduled to take place on November 18 at Blake High School from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Encouraged East County parents to complete the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) **Parent Satisfaction Survey**, to inform the school system what parents think about their child's school. Parents/guardians of students attending MCPS for 2008-2009 are asked to complete the survey online.
- Announced that the Montgomery County Planning Department will be holding **Growth Policy Community Meetings** to determine what is most valued by residents. Participants will be invited to discuss what they would like to see within four topic areas: connections, environment, design and diversity. ECCAB members are encouraged to attend these meetings.

Council's Report: No report.

Committee Reports

Outreach Committee: Marva Deskins, Chair

- Announced that, due to the facilitator's training held in preparation for the East County Leadership Summit, the committee did not meet.
- Thanked everyone for their help in making the Summit a success.

Economic Development and Infrastructure (ED&I) Committee: Tom Aylward, Chair

- Announced that the committee did not meet as their committee was preparing for the Summit.
- Requested that ED&I Committee members meet immediately following the evening's board meeting to discuss committee meeting dates and times.

Services Committee: Anthony Ramirez, Chair

- Announced that the Services Committee did not meet in person; however, they communicated via emails. The committee was busy with preparations for the Leadership Summit.
- Provided a draft version of a letter to the Director of Department of Transportation which addresses safety concerns regarding the new location of the Burtonsville Post Office.

Old Business

Chair Bobola asked if there was a motion to send the draft letter, submitted by the Services Committee, to the Director of the Department of Transportation regarding the safety concerns with regard to the location of the Burtonsville Post Office.

[**November 5, 2008 - 2**] A motion was made to send the letter, with revisions that bulleted out the points for State Highway Administration, was offered. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

New Business

1. **Eric Luedtke** motioned that a letter be written to the County Executive regarding the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. A discussion followed. This was referred to the Economic and Development and Infrastructure Committee. **Stan Doore** suggested that the letter should focus on BRT as it relates to East County, rather than its relationship to the overall plan.
2. **Alfreda Hunt Payne** attended the Northeast Consortium (NEC) Meeting of October 22 at Paint Branch High school. Participants heard that schools in the NEC are offering wonderful opportunities to students. They include magnet programs that are being offered to students in grades four through high school. The session was highly informative.
3. **Stan Doore** attended, on October 15, the parking tax meeting with business leaders. Afterwards, he shared comments that he had in a letter of October 16 to Councilmember Nancy Floreen. The meeting was attended by two dozen business members. The discussion was about adding fees for parking spaces. The response was as follows: this is counter productive to businesses, including shopping centers, and could have unintended consequences of driving businesses out of Montgomery County and making it difficult to get businesses to come to Montgomery County.
4. **Tom Aylward** announced there is a need to have a volunteer on the Committee of Department of Permitting Services representing the board. He is no longer on the committee due to scheduling conflicts. He explained the role of the member assigned to that committee, and shared that meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday at 5:00 pm in Rockville area.

Chair Bobola- asked if there was a member who was interested in volunteering to serve on the Committee of Department of Permitting Services. **John Thomas** volunteered.

Announcements

1. **Stan Doore** announced that his association's quarterly Community Meeting with the Department of Police is tentatively scheduled to be held on December 9 at 7:00 p.m. Topics of discussion will include gang prevention in East County; updates on the Hollywood Ballroom; and crime prevention.

2. **Stan Doore** reminded ECCAB that MCPS has approved the book “Choosing Civility” for schools to purchase.
3. **Stan Doore** distributed an article titled “Drivers need sparks of creativity to power electric vehicles,” dated October 21, 2008. Additionally, he announced that the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) has released a report that details a number of low-cost solutions to reduce the number of traffic fatalities in the U.S. each year. Copies of the study will be distributed at the next board meeting.
4. **Eileen Finnegan** announced that the County Executive’s report by the Code Enforcement Task Force will be given by Tom Street, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, on Thursday, November 20.
5. **Bill Strassberger** requested that Committee Chairs send a reminder to their members regarding upcoming committee meetings.
6. **Eric Luedtke** announced that Montgomery County Public School has a budget freeze, and asked Board members share any information that they have on PTA proposals for future budget cuts. ECCAB should keep up its interest in the budget in terms of the impact on East County schools.

Chair Bobola-asked members for volunteers to attend the meetings below:

- *November 10.* Department of Health and Human Services' Community Budget Forum, Office of Management Budget (OMB), concerning the County's budget forecast: **Benoy Thomas**.
- *November 12.* White Oak Recreation Center Public Forum: **Sheala Durant** (requested).
- *November 12.* FDA Meeting: **Anthony Ramirez**.
- *November 19.* County Executive’s Meeting with the Fairland Estate Community: **Eric Luedtke**.
- *November 18.* Reminded anyone interested may want to attend the Informational Public Workshop on MD 28/MD 198 Corridor Improvement Project Planning Study on November 18 at Blake High School from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- *November 19.* Northwest Branch Recreation Park Master Plan Meeting at Stonegate Elementary School at 7:00 p.m.: **Colleen Ionata**.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

The next ECCAB Meeting is scheduled to be held on December 3, 2008.